**2 Maccabees and the Origins of Atticism**

Before going into detail about my **narrative,** I feel the need to summarily present the text to which I will draw your attention. The book, is presented as an *epitome* (abstract) of the five exhaustive volumes written by a certain Jason of Cyrene and dedicated to τὰ Μακκαβαικά, refers with its title to the events that occurred during the attempt at paganizing the temple of Jerusalem led by the high priest Jason (175-172 BC), the corrupt successor of Onias III, and the subsequent war of liberation led by the devout Jews, led by Judah Maccabee. This text is the only one written directly in Greek that refers to the religious struggles that took place in Jerusalem between 176 and 160 BC.

From a stylistic point of view, a predominant tendency among scholars, postulating a date of 124 BC, as Momigliano does, or at least to the middle decades of the second century BCE; in short, a date not too far from the reconsecration of the Temple, has been to use the work of Polybius as a litmus test for many linguistic aspects of the work, even those which are otherwise eccentric compared to the standard Greek in which the books of the Septuagint are written. This is also the intention of Nikolaos Domazakis’ dissertation, the most recent one dedicated to neologisms in the book, which he discussed at Lund last March.

On the contrary, I believe that, on the basis of its lexical patrimony, one can demonstrate a certain independence of this writing from the Polybean prose by valuing a chapter hitherto neglected by the studies, i.e. that of the *hapax* *legomena* found in II Macc. compared to the other books of the Septuagint,[[1]](#footnote-1) many of which are not attested in the very useful *Polybios-Lexikon*. They are, therefore, an "intelligent category" of *hapax*, because they result from verification within a precise corpus, and are conducted on an unsurpassed tool such as the now hundred-year old list of concordances of Hatch and Redpath. To be precise, there are about 28 probable *hapax legomena totius Graecitatis* and 366 *hapax* with respect to the Septuagint corpus, figures which, as you can see, arouse a certain astonishment.

One of the most interesting hapax in the Septuagint is the adjective ληρώδης 'futile', 'silly', which has been systematically ignored in the comments. This is found in chapter 12, in a context that would have been of fundamental importance in the history of Christian doctrine regarding the definition of the existence of Purgatory. Judah decides to collect the bodies of the dead Jews after a clash with the pagans to grant them their funeral honors, when he discovers that they had hidden sacred objects (ἱέρωματα, another rarity) to the idols of the pagan city of Iamnia under their tunics. From this he understands that the reason for their defeat was the abandonment of their faith and sends offerings to the Temple of Jerusalem with the thought of resurrection.

εἰ μὴ γὰρ τοὺς προπεπτωκότας ἀναστῆναι προσεδόκα, περισσὸν καὶ ληρῶδες ὑπὲρ νεκρῶν εὔχεσθαι

"For if he did not have firm faith that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superflouous and foolish to pray for the dead."

This is, in fact, the first scriptural reference to the existence of a supernatural kingdom destined for the purification of sins. We come then to the use of ληρώδης, a *hapax* in the Septuagint, an adjective in -ώδης formed on the widespread noun λῆρος (ie. \* Lā-; lit. ló-ju) ‘foolishness.’ Regarding latter, attested from the time of Archilochus (fr 327 W.), I recorded a good frequency in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, for example in comedy. For the derivative adjective, however, there are very few attestations in classical literature: only one in Plato (Theaet 174d), Aristotle (Rh 1414b 15, HA 579b 3 ὁ), Hippocrates (Coa praesagia 429), and in the Septuagint only in IV Macc. 5.11.

The Platonic passage perhaps requires a few more words. Socrates, after having recounted the story of Thales, fallen into a well due to the hilarity of a Thracian servant, describes some aspects of the eradication of the philosopher with respect to society: "as to laudatory speeches and the boastings of others, it becomes manifest that he is laughing at the end of the day, but I'm laughing at it. As for Aristotle, it is a passage from the *Historia animalium* and one from the *Rhetoric*. In the first, ληρώδης is used to describe the widespread belief that the lionesses expel the uterus during childbirth (ὁ δὲ λεχθεὶς μῦθος περὶ τοῦ ἐκβάλλειν τὰς ὑστέρας τίκτοντα ἐστί), while in the second of the Rhetoric a dittology appears, κενὸν καὶ ληρῶδες, referring to the practice of resorting to a too thin categorization with respect to parts of speech.

“But one must only adopt a name to express a distinct species or a real difference; otherwise, it becomes empty and silly (ληρῶδες), like the terms introduced by Licymnius in his *Art*, where he speaks of ‘being wafted along’, ‘wandering from the subject’ and ‘ramifications’”.

With regard to the *Coa presagia* of the Hippocratic Corpus, the text refers to to symptoms of tuberculosis: the suppression of the expectoration of saliva manifests with frequent delusions, ληρωδῶς (αἱ ἐν φθινώδεσιν ἐπισχέσιες πτυάλων ἐξιστᾶσι ληρωδῶς · αἱμοῤῥοΐδα τούτοισιν ἐλπὶς ἐπιφανῆναι).

The ThLG returns even more scarce occurrences for successive centuries: once at the doctor Erasistratus, who lived in the third century BCE., but the testimony is indirect, because it is transmitted by Galen. An ancient scholia of Pindar, (Isth. III 48) indirectly shows a passage from the historical Artemon of Pergamum (2nd century BCE) related to the myth of Coronis, defined as τέλεον ὄντι ληρώδει. On the papyrus front, the only recorded case is interesting – it is found in a letter dated to the second century BCE (BGU 3 1011), relating to a dispute between officials. In this case it is found in dittology with ψευδῆ, demonstrating its tendency to reinforce a previous adjective (eg κενός, ψευδής, περιττός): καὶ ψευδῆ προσα̣γ̣ [γ] έλ̣ [λε] ται κατανοεῖς καὶ αὐτός.

The noun λῆρος and the derivative adjective are absent from the lexicon of Polybius (which however presents the verb ληρέω), but the lexical group will, however, be variously represented in some later authors: Philo (1x, Legat. 168.6), Plutarch (2x, Phil 34.7, 84.19), but especially in Galen (43x, very frequent ληρώδης in works like the de naturalibus facultatibus and de methodo medendi) and in Christian literature (Eusebius with three occurrences; the prolific and polyglot Epiphanius of Salamis of Cyprus in the 4th century AD seems to be unable to do without it, with 46 times, including the noun ληρωδία).

It will also be used frequently in scholia (Homer, Hesiod, Aristophanes, Lycophagius), with 19 cases of difficult dating, but mostly medieval or late antiquity (for example, at Il. 23.471 ἀθετεῖται ὡς ληρώδης; 97.42 ἀλλὰ ληρώδεις οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι: after all, semantically the adjective lends itself well to a tranchant comment).

In short, in the face of this type of data, I believe that the expression περισσὸν καὶ ληρῶδες, 'superfluous and futile', of our author deserves some more consideration, compared to the silence of the commentators (among the most recent, Goldstein, Schwarz, Doran , Brutti, Domazakis). It can be considered Attic finesse, if it is worth mentioning the occurrence of the name λῆρος in the 5th century BCE more than the minimal occurrences of ληρώδης: in any case it is a lexical choice that demonstrates a variegated literary culture and the desire for refinement that can draw on a surprisingly rich source, sometimes even wider than the expressive range of Polybius.

As with ληρῶδες I have indicated a linguistic refinement, on the other hand, it must be said that the lexicon does not lack demonstrably Hellenistic forms, devoid of any literary blazon. I limit myself here to two examples. An adverb such as ἀδιαλείπτως 'incessantly' (4x in II Macc.), a *hapax* in Polybius (9.3.8 ἀδιαλείπτως νικῶντες), had become fashionable in the *koinè* already according to Meecham 1935, 230, which indicates two steps of Aristea (92 and 294) and the evidence coming from the papyri (PTebt. I 27, 45 of 113 BC τὴν ἀδιαλίπτως προσφερομένην σπουδήν): the ThLG reports as many as 1126 occurrences in the post-classical Greek. If it is true that, unlike other neoformations and modulations of the post-classical language, it would not have provoked the reprobation of the purists of II sec. CE. like Frinico and Meride, nonetheless it contributes to increase the Hellenistic caliber of the work. Even more so does (or at least seems to) the very rare formation διάσταλσις 'disposition' (13.25), created on a theme σταλ-, the same as the perfect ἕσταλ-μαι. *Hapax legomenon totius Graecitatis*, apparent to the later στάλσις attested in Galen (4x), probably would have been enough to horrify an observant Atticist of the imperial age. Here the problem, however, is that it is a term not attested in the papyri, so not necessarily from spoken Greek, but more likely from the inventiveness of the author.

A second aspect that contributes, perhaps more than others, to give an idea of ​​the grammatical erudition of the book is a phonetic one. This concerns the treatment of the -ττ- intervocalic group that is sometimes preferred to the -σσ- typical of *koinè*. Before examining it in detail, however, it is appropriate to express a preliminary warning, as Connolly himself does in his study of Atticisms in the documentary papyri of the early centuries of the Christian era: it cannot be ignored that many of these choices are due to scholar copyists. I add personally that we can conjecture that they intervened on the text precisely because they felt its stylistic tenor to be higher than the average of the other Septuagint books. In short, this type of formal, microstylistic choices (especially σσ / ττ), does not guarantee a strict adherence to the original aspect of the text.

With respect to the σσ- / ττ- nexus, I found an almost indifferent distribution between the two possibilities (eg παρατάσσομενοι coexists with ταττόμενοι), a datum that is quite important compared to the massive diffusion of the sigmoid forms in the Septuagint. For some terms, moreover, I think we can detect a significant choice: for ex. the attic θᾶττον in the Septuaginta is exclusive to II Macc. (Thackeray 1909, 184), with three attestations, while the most common form of the comparative of ταχύς 'fast' in the Hellenistic Greek is τάχιον (for example in the Book of Wisdom 13.9 τὸν τούτων δεσπότην πῶς τάχιον οὐχ εὗρον). In this respect the author agrees with Polybius, who also uses only the Attic form (20x), to the detriment of both the low *koinè* and the double sigma. In the non-literary papyrus reviewed by Connolly, of the Christian age, it will be possible to find only two texts with θᾶττον. "The rarity of this word, as opposed to the regular Koine τάχιον, makes the word itself an" Atticism "more than the use of the -tt-. Given this it would be very unlikely that this word would ever appear in the -ss-form "(Connolly 1983). Another interesting case of Atticism is the neologism γλωττοτομεῖν against γλῶσσα (3x), whereas the New Testament would have had only γλῶσσα and γλωσσόκομον. The same should be said for the comparative ἥττων: "Thackeray says that ἥττων occurs in the LXX eleven times (though six of these in 2 Maccabees, a highly Atticistic work)" (Connolly 1983).

In the light of such a non-homogeneous distribution, Thackeray teaches us that for a phenomenon of this type it is appropriate to evaluate the preferences on a case-by-case basis: he did this by reviewing: -πράττειν (x3), καταφάττειν (x1), ταράττειν (x1 ) but also ἐπιταράσσειν (x1), τάττειν (x1) but also -τάσσειν (x2), φρυάττεσθαι (x1), διαφυλάττειν (x2), but also -φυλάσσειν (x2), along with μεταλλάσσειν, βδελύσσεσθαι, δράσσεσθαι, (ἐκ) πλήσσειν and ἐντινάσσειν ".

It is not enough, therefore, to observe these numerous moments of finesse to speak of a systematic linguistic Atticism from the author of this book. In addition to this finesse, in fact, there are Hellenistic forms such as ἐντινάσσω, 'to clash' which not only constitutes a rare Greek formation, as evidenced by the expressive prefix, but also presents the typical sigmoid treatment of *koinè*. And it is enough to look at the same passage which contains ληρῶδες to get clear the level of confusion of this author, or rather what I call occasional and non-systematic Atticism of this era. One can find περισσόν in dictology with ληρῶδες with sigmoid treatment. "This word only appears with -ss- in the Ptolemaic papyri, the LXX and the NT. Gignac observes that in the Roman and Byzantine papyri -ss predominates "(Connolly 1983).

Regarding the chapter of the forms γιγν- / γιν-, the situation is even more markedly biased towards the *koinè*. The total absence in II Macc. of the atticizing forms, moreover, is in line with the data of the papyri and the Septuagint: the revival of forms γιγν- would begin many centuries later (Gignac).

Another rather interesting trait, with which I will conclude, goes more in the direction of the Ionic dialect than the Attic. This is the uncontracted genitive plural τειχέων, in place of the classic τειχῶν, in two passages of the book (12.14, 12.27), to which one may add ὀρέων (9.8). Also in the papyri of Herodas (datable to the first or second century AD) are attested forms of plural genitive πυρέων (2.80) from πυρός or even χειρέων (7.3), due to the possible influence of χειλέων (Cassio 1996, 161). In a funeral inscription from Smyrna, dedicated to this Antiphile and dated between the 2nd and 1st century BCE, it is possible to find, next to forms of *koinè*, the uncontracted genitive plural ἐτέων, which, together with other formal choices (eg σπορήν, ξεῖνε, ἐμεῦ), clearly shows how at that chronological level "un peu d ' ionien était nécité pour pourre vraiment chic "a public text, certainly compiled by a" rhéteur expérimenté "(Cassius 1996, 167). Thumb indicated the alternation between contracted and uncontracted forms (τειχέων / πηχῶν) as a phenomenon – even remaining in the context of a comparison between individual books of the Septuagint or New Testament - «im Sinne landschaftlicher Differenzen», (Thumb 1901, 186), possible and difficult to define. The problem is that our author is not systematic even in this, since elsewhere he employs the most common ἐτῶν (1x), ἐθνῶν (8x), πληθῶν (3x).

From a survey conducted on ThLG , it results that the first non-Ionic prose text in which you can document an uncontracted genitive for τεῖχος, already a lucky noun for Euripides already because of its utility in tragic situations of siege, both Xenophon (2x, Agesilaus 1:22 and Hipparchicus 4.15), followed in the Hellenistic age by Philo of Byzantium (p.82 Thevenot) and by the Septuagint. Within the latter, the relationship between τειχῶν and τειχέων is 2:12, while the contemporary, and more learned, Polybius knows only the contracted form (21x). The reality is that, as Henry Meecham said, "the Κοινή preferred the uncontracted form of genitive plural in certain third declension neuters in -ος. Hence the LXX always has ὀρέων (see III Reg. 21.23), but contracts in the other cases, ὄρους, ὄρη »(Meecham 1935, 80). Even Aristea, who does not present this noun, once uses ὀρέων (119), as does the Apocalypse of John as well (6.16). Many authors (Joseph Flavius, Appian, Origen, Malala etc.) for centuries would have continued to use the genitive τειχέων (Christians and Byzantines often in a massive way). In conclusion, also in this respect, the author of II Macc. shows himself unsystematic and open to experimenting with various formal possibilities, although one should not postulate from τειχέων a withdrawal from a poetic source (which is not ruled out in the light of the other poetic language in the book).

In conclusion, if we can speak of Atticism within II Macc., I think these are just some scholarly choices due to the search for greater grammatical correctness by a Jewish author as eager as possible not to lose face. The scholastic and erudite aspect of this experiment is obvious: our author is ashamed even to use the trivial βλέπω, not because it was current at the time, but precisely for this reason, and prefers a more chic compound such as συνοράω (6x , always at the participle). Instead of insisting on a reliance on Polybius, which remains difficult to verify, as Domazakis admits himself, and using this theory to propose a new chronology, I think it is more profitable to focus on these literary pretensions in the work to grasp the real stylistic level: an emblematic case is that of the prologue, in which the author presents the book as the summary of the most extensive work by Jason of Cyrene. At that time (2.28) he claims to willingly give up precision to the historical account of the historian and reserve for himself the search for brevity. It is thanks to Luciano Canfora that the Thucydidean model (the famous methodological chapter in 1.22.2) was discovered in the expression τὸ μὲν διακριβοῦν περὶ ἑκάστων (Canfora 2008, 546). In my opinion, it is likely that the use of the substantive neutrals that are concentrated in the prologue (2.28-31) should be traced back to a mimesis of the Athenian historical style: τὸ μὲν διακριβοῦν περὶ ἑκάστων, τὸ δὲ ἐπιπορεύεσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἐμβατεύειν καὶ περίπατον ποιεῖσθαι λόγων καὶ πολυπραγμονεῖν, especially terms like τὸ δὲ σύντομον τῆς λέξεως μεταδιώκειν καὶ τὸ ἐξεργαστικὸν τῆς πραγματείας παραιτεῖσθαι. Instead of invoking Polybius, then there is Thucydides and the mannerisms of classical scholasticism by a Greek-speaking Jewish author.

This dimension is probably the most correct one with which to frame this book, since it contains the most ancient attestation of the notion of Ἰουδαισμός, in the *querelle* about the most ancient origins of the Anti-Semitism. Although it is now outside this project, the traditional attribution to a so-called “Aasian current” (Gil, Richnow) remains valid, also to the extent that the author was unaware of this literary categorization, which quite probably emerged only starting from 110 BC. (Lucarini 2015). Rather, he did nothing but write according to the "baroque" taste typical of the time, but with all the linguistic care of the scholar. This probably explains the coexistence of terms taken from classical authors with incontrovertible Hellenistic novelties, but also the grammatical zeal, already Atticizing, evident in choices such as θᾶττον, which is only found here in the Septuagint.

1. The particularity of the lexicon was already noted in the first large commentary, that of Grimm in 1857. «Der Verfasser gebraucht aber auch seltene oder sonst nicht weiter vorkommende Worte und Ausdrucksweisen […] oder gangbare Worte in ungewöhnlicher Bedeutung» (Grimm 1857, 7). Later studies have mostly privileged the historical and theological dimension of the text, as does Abel’s commentary in 1949 at the end of the day, although it is very rich in references to Greek literature and *koinè*. «À côte de mots communs à II Macc., à Polybe et aux papyrus du IIe siècle avant notre ère, on rencontre chez Jason de Cyrène et son abréviateur un certain nombre d' ἅπαξ λεγόμενα, des verbes composées peu ou point usités ailleurs, des mots ou des locutions employés dans un sens qu'ils n'ont pas dans la langue usuelle, des mots ou des accords réprouvés par la grammaire qui ont jeté dans la perplexité les traducteurs et les exègétes anciens et modernes» (A 1949, XXXVI). «Obwohl es sich bei unserem Buch wahrscheinlich um das einzige, vollständig erhaltene Werk der hellenistisch-patethischen Geschichtsschreibung handelt, sind bisher Sprache und Stil noch nicht genauer untersucht worden» (Richnow 1967, IV). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)